

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES AND SAFETY FOR PEDESTRIANS

Mr. Speaker, my goal in Congress is for the Federal government to be a better partner in making our communities more livable, to make our families safe, healthy, and economically secure.

One of the indicator species of a livable community is the pedestrian. Earlier this week, people in Montgomery County were shocked, I am sure, to read that in their community pedestrian deaths were as high as homicides. In 1998 and 1999, 25 people were killed in pedestrian accidents, the same as those that were killed in homicides.

Really, this is not news. The statistics are that Americans are 160 percent more likely to be killed by a car than to be shot and killed by a stranger. It is the equivalent of an airline crash every 2 weeks in this country, and for every person who is killed, there are another 20 who are injured; 6,000 dead in all, and 110,000 injured.

The seniors of our community are at the highest risk, almost twice as likely to be killed or injured. Walking for them is more important, not just as a form of exercise, but it is an important part of their transportation system, because many of them no longer drive.

Mr. Speaker, it is important because everyone at some point in their journey is a pedestrian. But there are lessons to be learned from our experience. We are finding that some of the sprawling unplanned communities that are primarily auto-oriented are the most dangerous places for people to walk, places like Fort Lauderdale and Miami; Atlanta, that we have talked a lot about on the floor of this House is sort of a poster child for unplanned growth and sprawled; and Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Dallas, Texas.

Ironically, many of the older, more pedestrian-oriented are the safest. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by one account, is the safest place to walk in America.

It does not have to be this way. There are opportunities for us to plan for people, not just for cars; to put uses closer together, not mandate that they be separated from where people work, where they live, and where they shop.

The Federal government itself can be a partner by not taking an historic Post Office in downtown small town America and locating it by a strip mall out at the edge of town without even paved sidewalks.

There is a whole philosophy that has developed, an engineering approach that is called 'traffic calming' that we had great success with in our community in Portland, Oregon, to be able to make a difference for the way that people live.

The Federal government in the ISTEA-T-21 legislation has set aside significant funds for traffic safety, but sadly, many of the States are not using those resources in ways that will make pedestrians safe. Fourteen percent of all motor vehicle-related deaths are pedestrians, yet only 1 percent of the highway safety money from the Federal government is used for pedestrian safety.

It is important for us to use the tools that we have available, that we are sensitive to putting people into the planning process to make our communities more livable and make our families safer, healthier, and economically secure.